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ABSTRACT

The Federal Government needs people who can actually communicate in a foreign language, and our academic language programs are not producing such people. To solve this problem, there has to be a change in our basic attitudes and philosophies about language teaching and learning. Language courses must be transformed from passive exercises into active experiences. Bold new approaches must be considered, such as applied group dynamics, incentive grades based on effectiveness of personal approach, and close coordination with English departments and other branches of the humanities. The Government employs teams of native speakers and linguistics to teach foreign languages to Federal employees; native English speakers with foreign language majors do not meet the requirements for teaching at the Foreign Service Institute. The number of other available government jobs where language ability is primary is relatively small. The Federal Government can, under existing circumstances, do little to expand the job market for foreign language majors, but foreign language competence can be helpful to a job applicant for many kinds of positions. An aggressive attempt must be made to strengthen the position of foreign language study as communication within the framework of the liberal arts curriculum. (Author/PP)

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Foreign Language Majors: The Washington Perspective

In his Ohio State University address of August 30 President Ford alluded to a search for "a new climate of credibility" between academe and employers, calling for "the practical application of education" to provide university graduates with what he termed "jobs that make sense as well as money." In so doing the President was fixing public attention upon the growing problem of unemployment among recent baccalaureates, or of employment limited to fields other than those in which these graduates were trained.

This situation is becoming increasingly familiar to every teacher; its causes, ramifications and implications are much less known. In fact, the kinds of questions often put to me concerning Federal employment frequently reveal a lack of knowledge of even the dimensions of the problem, let alone a hint of directions in which to proceed toward a solution. Having operated within a framework of increasing educational specialization for the last decade or so, the gradual erosion of specific, specialized job markets by our

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current economic trends has left students and faculty alike at a loss to answer the question, "What can a major in a given subject area do with his training if there is no specific market for his narrowly defined skills?"

The academic field of modern foreign languages is no exception to this general situation. In fact, the vagueness which all too frequently characterizes queries concerning Federal employment for modern language majors is ample indication that there is a very real communication gap between job seekers and prospective employers in one of the very fields in which communication plays the most fundamental role.

In order, then, to give some shape to this amorphous problem it is necessary to define some very basic concepts and to ask some questions which are deceptively obvious; to reflect upon the validity of some long-accepted pedagogical tenets, and to weigh carefully theses long held by some to be heretical; to objectively consider what we have been doing as teachers, and to subjectively empathize with our students.

The fact that Professor Peterson asked me to appear

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here today is an indication that this process of re-appraisal has begun. The fact that numerous agencies of the Federal Government have asked me to state their case is similarly an indication that your concern has more than one sympathetic ear.

But sympathy is not enough in this case; the problem is a practical one, and practical ideas and concepts are going to have to be examined before we can get anywhere at all.

In the very first place we need to consider what a foreign language major is, or is supposed to be. The term "foreign language major" itself is deceptively simple, for we often tend to think of a given course of study as a pathway leading to a professional career. Engineering students study to become engineers, law students to become lawyers, education students to become teachers, anthropology students to become anthropologists, and so on. But what does a foreign language student study to become? The classical pattern has always been to become a foreign language teacher, at a level in the educational system commensurate with the student's ability to get more and more

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advanced degrees. The path has always been a scholarly one, firmly established in the humanities tradition and thus inextricably bound up with the academic life both in its content and expectations.

But while sometime academicians are often found in the Federal Government, they are most often there not to perform an academic function but in the exercise of some special ability which they have learned to perform in pre-Government work. They have entered Federal service not as direct university outputs, but as experienced workers in some field which the Government feels is useful, and on which a convenient "handle", say administrator, economist, research scientist, and so on, can be placed. The Government does not hire majors to be majors, or usually scholars to be scholars. This is not merely a matter of semantics, but derives rather from the actual needs of our Governmental system: service rendered is as a rule based on a specific need, or more precisely, in line with the defined mission of a specific agency. There are, unfortunately, few Government agencies whose principal mission is in the academic area. You will find that even such agencies as VISTA and the Peace Corps do not hire

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people to teach as a career, but only for a comparatively short time.

Thus, when an applicant comes to the Government looking for employment he must be prepared to say just what it is he thinks he can do, rather than stating his academic background. Yet this is precisely what many people are doing. The aimlessness of many of these requests can scarcely be better exemplified than by the following letter, which I received in recent months from a student at a major Eastern university. It is, lamentably, all too typical:

> Dear Sir:
>
> My name is Thornsbury Grimlatch and I am a second semester junior at the University of the East. My major is languages primarily is french [sic] but also spanish [sic] and I have just begun russian [sic]. A few weeks ago I wrote a letter to this Institute inquiring about programs and jobs for language graduates and received a letter on the limited amount of openings to these graduates. I would like to know if this Institute provides a graduate program or

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any program that enables a college language graduate to do something with one's life other than teaching a language. I would appreciate any help with this question as graduation is coming up.

Thank You,

Thornsbury Grimlatch

I have changed the writer's name and that of the school, but in all other particulars the letter is quoted verbatim. I sent off a diplomatic reply to this student, but it was all I could do to suppress the suggestion that in addition to French, Spanish, and Russian a deep study of English would be required before we could even begin to consider employment for him.

Mr. Grimlatch's frustration is obvious, but how much more bitter he would be if he knew how poorly he is actually prepared to undertake the employment he desires! Even more disturbing, though, is the question of how much of his various languages he commands. While I had no way of testing his proficiency in any of the languages he had allegedly studied, I did have some very significant Institute statistics to go by, but before I can present these

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to you I would like to digress for a few minutes to explain what the Foreign Service Institute is and how its School of Language Studies functions.

First mandated under the Foreign Service Act of 1946, as amended, the Institute exists as part of the Department of State in order to provide, in the words of the Act, " . . . training and instruction to officers and employees of the Service and of the Department and to other officers of the Government for whom training and instruction in the field of foreign relations is necessary, and . . . to promote and foster programs of study incidental to such training . . ."[1] Training in foreign languages was specifically included in this mandate, and the Institute was given primacy in this field under the Act as follows: "Other agencies of the Government shall wherever practicable avoid duplicating the facilities of the Institute and the training provided by the Secretary at the Institute or elsewhere."[2]

Organized administratively somewhat along university lines, FSI is made up of four major schools, respectively the School of Professional Studies, the Center for Area and

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Country Studies, the School of Language Studies, and the Senior Seminar in Foreign Policy. For advanced, special instruction for senior officers there is in addition the Foreign Affairs Executive Seminar; for special training available only at universities the Office of Academic Relations is charged with making appropriate arrangements.

The role of the School of Language Studies is a profound and far-reaching one. It conducts intensive and part-time foreign language classes in more than 30 languages at the Institute in Washington, at three branch schools in Yokohama, Taichung, and Beirut, and at more than 200 Foreign Service posts around the world. In addition to producing most of our own teaching materials (which are sold to the public through the Government Printing Office) the School also is a leader in research and development of foreign language teaching methods. Finally, it has developed and continues to maintain standards of foreign language proficiency which are either subscribed to directly or accepted in principle by virtually all civilian agencies of the Federal Government. Without exception the actual teaching of foreign languages is done by native speakers, who work in extremely close cooperation with, but under the

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supervision of, professional linguists, that is, scientists such as myself who deal with the theory and application of human communication through language.

Human communication through language--that is what we are concerned with, and that is the guiding principle behind everything we do and say. In considering foreign languages and Americans who use them we are therefore most properly concerned not only with the fact of language, but also its substance--information--and it is a combination of these two factors which has led FSI to establish the foreign language standards which are so widely accepted and used in the Federal Government. These have been formalized into a set of absolute ratings which are arranged along a scale from zero to five, where zero represents no practical ability and five is native proficiency. The scale is also bifurcated in order to separate speaking and reading proficiencies. These definitions of absolute proficiency are of the most fundamental importance to our discussion here, and for that reason I would like to present them to you now:

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ELEMENTARY PROFICIENCY

B.F

S-1 Able to satisfy routine travel needs and minimum courtesy requirements. Can ask and answer questions on topics very familiar to him; within the scope of his very limited language experience can understand simple questions and statements, allowing for slowed speech, repetition or paraphrase; speaking vocabulary inadequate to express anything but the most elementary needs; errors in pronunciation and grammar are frequent, but can be understood by a native speaker used to dealing with foreigners attempting to speak his language; while topics which are "very familiar" and elementary needs vary considerably from individual to individual, any person at the S-1 level should be able to order a simple meal, ask for shelter or lodging, ask and give simple directions, make purchases, and tell time.

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B.F.

R-1 Able to read some personal and place names, street signs, office and shop designations, numbers, and isolated words and phrases. Can recognize all the letters in the printed version of an alphabetic system and high-frequency elements of a syllabary or a character system.

LIMITED WORKING PROFICIENCY

B.F.

S-2 Able to satisfy routine social demands and limited work requirements. Can handle with confidence but not with facility most social situations including introductions and casual conversations about current events, as well as work, family, and autobiographical information; can handle limited work requirements, needing help in handling any complications or difficulties; can get the gist of most conversations on non-technical subjects (i.e. topics which require no specialized knowledge) and has a speaking vocabulary sufficient to express himself

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simply with some circumlocutions; accent, though often quite faulty, is intelligible; can usually handle elementary constructions quite accurately but does not have thorough or confident control of the grammar.

R-2 Able to read simple prose, in a form equivalent to typescript or printing, on subjects within a familiar context. With extensive use of a dictionary can get the general sense of routine business letters, international news items, or articles in technical fields within his competence.

MINIMUM PROFESSIONAL PROFICIENCY

S-3 Able to speak the language with sufficient structural accuracy and vocabulary to participate in most formal and informal conversations on practical, social, and professional topics. Can discuss particular interests and special fields of competence with reasonable ease; comprehension is quite complete for a normal rate of speech;

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vocabulary is broad enough that he rarely has to grope for a word; accent may be obviously foreign; control of grammar good; errors never interfere with understanding and rarely disturb the native speaker.

R-3 Able to read standard newspaper items addressed to the general reader, routine correspondence, reports and technical material in his special field. Can grasp the essentials of articles of the above types without using a dictionary; for accurate understanding moderately frequent use of a dictionary is required. Has occasional difficulty with unusually complex structures and low-frequency idioms.

FULL PROFESSIONAL PROFICIENCY

S-4 Able to use the language fluently and accurately on all levels normally pertinent to professional needs. Can understand and participate in any conversation within the range of his experience with a high degree

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of fluency and precision of vocabulary; would rarely be taken for a native speaker, but can respond appropriately even in unfamiliar situations; errors of pronunciation and grammar quite rare; can handle informal interpreting from and into the language.

R-4 Able to read all styles and forms of the language pertinent to professional needs. With occasional use of a dictionary can read moderately difficult prose readily in any area directed to the general reader, and all material in his special field including official and professional documents and correspondence; can read reasonably legible handwriting without difficulty.

B F

NATIVE OR BILINGUAL PROFICIENCY

S-5 Speaking proficiency equivalent to that of an educated native speaker. Has complete fluency in the language such that his speech on all levels is fully accepted by

B.F

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educated native speakers in all of its features, including breadth of vocabulary and idiom, colloquialisms, and pertinent cultural references.

R-5 Reading proficiency equivalent to that of an educated native. Can read extremely difficult and abstract prose, as well as highly colloquial writings and the classic literary forms of the language. With varying degrees of difficulty can read all normal kinds of handwritten documents.[3]

Each of these ratings, it should be noted, can be modified by a plus (+) to indicate proficiency substantially above the defined minimum but still not as high as the next highest level.

The importance of this rating system cannot be overestimated, for it is the backbone of the Government's foreign language evaluative scheme. It should be pointed out once again that while all agencies do not use these precise definitions exactly as FSI states them, all civilian agencies do agree with them in principle, and use them in

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evaluating employees or candidates for employment.

One of FSI's vital functions is to determine the language proficiency of State Department employees or of employees of other agencies upon request. This is done by means of interview-type tests using a two-person team consisting of a linguist and a native speaker of the tested language, both of whom have been prepared for this kind of evaluative task. Rather than using a standard test form, we employ established interview techniques to make our determinations. The tests are similarly conducted regardless of whether the candidate has learned the foreign language in or out of school, recently or many years past. And we should note most carefully that neither the tests nor their results have any necessarily direct relationship to length of study or academic grades of any kind.

Furthermore, mere manipulative skill with a foreign language does not insure a high score on such a test--content plays an equally vital part. If the candidate is a political scientist he must be able to discuss politics, if in the commercial or economic fields, then business or economics, and so on. Such discussions need not be of

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professional depth, but the candidate must demonstrate sufficient proficiency to at least talk intelligently in lay terms about a current issue pertaining to his field, if he is to receive professional rating.

Even the personality of the candidate must be taken into consideration. After all, he is being evaluated for a job which will require official contact with foreigners, and the overall impression he makes is part and parcel of communication. Thus, for example, an individual who enjoys stimulating conversation and who is naturally outgoing may achieve more with but limited manipulative ability on such a test than a person with vast intellectual knowledge of the language but who is also highly adept at sticking his foot in his mouth, even in his native language! While the testing team must analyze the performance of the candidate according to the definitions, the team must at the same time take into serious consideration the overall impression which the candidate makes on the native speaker of the tested language. Communication is, after all, more than language.

How does all of this then fit in with realistic aims

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of training? How much language can one learn? To even entertain such questions as these is a giant step beyond the lay person's conception of foreign language learning, because for the uninitiated even the phrase "speak a language" is really undefined. It is indeed the most common experience for a linguist who has just been introduced at a party to be approached with something like: "So you're a linguist! How many languages do you speak?" And I must confess in such situations, as I stifle the return query, "What do you mean by that?", to wonder whether I would be taken for Socratic, Freudian, or merely insufferable for asking such a question.

I can only call to mind an old FSI in-house anecdote concerning a person claiming to be a polyglot who showed up asking for a job as a language instructor. When asked which language he was qualified to teach his response was, "I zpeak sirrty-zeffen lenkwitches, Enklish ze best!"

But the question of realistic goals of language learning and proficiency remains a valid one, and it deserves

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a definitive answer. We in the Government recognize that for an American different languages vary greatly according to ease of acquisition, and at FSI we group the world's languages according to what we call Category A and Category B. Into the former category fall most of the commonly-taught European languages--French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish--along with a few others--Malay, Indonesian, Danish, Swedish, Dutch, and Norwegian. The other languages of the world fall into Category B, which in turn is subdivided into groups arranged by comparative difficulty. Now, all Foreign Service Officers, the professional diplomats of the Department of State, are required to attain a tested proficiency of S-3/R-3 in a Category A language or S-2/R-2 in a Category B language before they may receive more than one promotion. If they do not so qualify upon entry into the Foreign Service they normally receive training sufficient to meet this requirement. In all cases, however, the proficiency of S-3/R-3 is considered the minimum for representational work abroad in the host country's language.

At the same time, however, we at FSI do not feel that it is possible to reach S-4 solely through classroom

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training, inasmuch as the demands of the S-4/R-4 definitions can in most cases only be met after extensive residence in country with daily exposure to the local language and culture at many levels of contact. This means, of course, that our training must be oriented in such a way as to achieve the S-3/R-3 level, but here again we have to remember the fundamental implications of what we have just said.

Our task as trainers is to provide officers with a foreign language proficiency at the minimum professional level, as defined. It does not mean, by strict definition, completing a fixed curriculum, spending a certain number of classroom hours, finishing a number of books, or courses, or even semesters. In short, it has nothing to do at all with what is usually considered the background of a foreign language major.

To illustrate the conceptual chasm facing us here I would like to contrast two course curriculum statements, one from a major university and one from my own Dutch program at FSI. In the first instance I quote from the first-year statement, then from the fourth-year description

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applied to courses throughout the Modern Languages Department:

> First Year. Emphasis on audio-lingual skills. Intensive drills on structure. Emphasis on pronunciation and fluency in common speech situations. Inductive presentation of grammar. Basic vocabulary. Reading as auxiliary skill . . .
>
> Fourth Year. Perfection of audio-lingual and reading-writing skills. Progression from controlled conversation and composition to free speech and writing. Designed especially for majors.

Now from my own Dutch course:

> The course has as its two primary objectives: 1) development of the ability to interact with social and professional competence within the framework of Dutch language and culture, and 2) development of the ability to read pertinent materials in Dutch. For this reason the student is strongly encouraged to relate to the instructional staff which, under the general guidance of a scientific linguist, in turn makes every

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> effort to prepare the student for the kind of social and professional contacts he will have to make on the job. The student's success in training is therefore measured chiefly in terms of his ability to respond credibly in a Dutch-speaking situation, hold the interest of a Dutch speaker in s[illegible]tantive conversation, and demonstrate an u[illegible]ng of Dutch culture both in its own [illegible]s it relates to its American counterpa[illegible]

I don't think I need to belabor the difference of objectives between the two statements. Rather, I would like to point out that while Dutch is rather typical of FSI Category A language programs, its purposes and objectives are equally applicable across the entire spectrum of languages we teach. I might say that my course runs 20 weeks, that the stu[illegible]s [illegible]an intensive basis for six hours a day, five days a week, that we sometimes use an audio-lingual method (and sometimes not!), that we use a particular textbook, that we use a language lab; but these details are really not of much interest to the supervisor in the Netherlands for whom our student will eventually work.

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What he wants to know is whether the graduate will be able to function in Dutch, and my responsibility is to do everything in my power to see to it that he does.

Moreover, when the graduate arrives in country speaking Dutch the matter of how he learned it, or where, or how long it took, or even whether he was a major or not, will be a matter of only incidental interest. In point of fact these details are largely administrative matters, especially once the proficiency of the student has been established.

All of which brings us around to a very important fact of life: as far as Government employers are concerned the term "language major" is an administrative detail, and will remain so until tied in with some sort of skill evaluation that means something in our terms of measurement. Here once again we perceive the amorphousness of the problem faced by the language major seeking Federal employment, namely that his credentials are essentially meaningless, not worthless, mind you, but meaningless. If a candidate tells me that he has studied Russian for six years and produces transcripts to prove it I will still

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have to ask him how much Russian he commands, i.e. what kind of Russian-speaking situations he can handle and with what degree of credibility. Again, this is not a disparaging statement, not in the least. It is quite possible that the candidate speaks very credible Russian indeed, but evidence of a major in Russian is not enough to establish that. Rather, a statement of experience with the language would carry more weight than a stack of transcripts.

How in fact do our various university language programs measure up to Government standards? This question is natural enough, but I'm not sure it can really be answered fairly. On the surface, however, we would have to say the results have not been very good, and now I can cite the statistics I mentioned in connection with Thornsbury Grimlatch.

While the Federal Government as a whole does not maintain statistics on the foreign language proficiency of new employees, the Foreign Service Institute has made such studies of new Foreign Service Officers from time to time since 1959. This type of employee is of particular interest to us here, for the entrance requirements of the

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Foreign Service are such as to exclude anyone lacking a Bachelor's Degree. Since the studies I am about to cite were done before the trend away from compulsory foreign language study at the university level had set in in earnest, we may safely assume that the vast majority of employees included in these figures had had at least the equivalent of two years of study of a foreign language prior to Government employment.

An FSI study covering the period from 1959 to 1963 revealed that the annual rate of new officers lacking even Elementary Proficiency (S-1) ranged between 29.3 and 36.5 per cent.[4] The annual rate of those qualifying with Minimum Professional proficiency (S-3) varied between 20.5 and 29.4 per cent. The median entering proficiency during this period ranged only between S-1 and S-1+. The annual rate of entrants qualifying with S-2 or better lay between 40 and 46 per cent.

In 1970 another definitive study was done, this time using a slightly different system of tabulation.[5] In this study 17 per cent of the new officers claimed to have no practical proficiency, and of the tests given 21.7 per cent

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fell short of the S-1 level. These two percentages cannot be added precisely, since there were some officers who took more than one test, but there seems to have been little overall change from the preceding study, at least in this regard. Twenty-eight per cent of the officers qualified at S-3, a slight improvement over the prior study, but the median level remained at around S-1.

The most recent such survey, done for fiscal year 1973, still showed little significant change.[6] This time 20.7 per cent of the entering officers qualified at S-3 or better, while at the other end of the spectrum 19.3 per cent claimed no practical proficiency. Of those tests given 12.3 per cent failed to make S-1. Once again the median result lay around S-1.

While none of the studies to which I have referred considered the academic backgrounds of the subject population, the Foreign Service has historically not attracted many foreign language majors. John B. Carroll's study of 1967 does, however, give us an insight into where majors produced during the sixties would have placed.[7] In this exhaustive survey of the language abilities of foreign

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language majors a way was found to relate the Modern Language Association Achievement Tests to the FSI Absolute Proficiency Ratings. While the MLA tests used covered a variety of skills, I should like to draw your attention to the speaking test results. For three of the commonly-taught foreign languages, namely French, German, and Spanish, the median speaking ability of the tested sample ranged from S-2 to S-2+ as measured by the FSI scale.[8] Thus this study would seem to tell us that while two years of foreign language study produced somewhere around S-1 on the average, a foreign language major improved upon this by about one proficiency level.

My purpose here is not to editorialize on the results of language major programs, but rather to indicate the philosophical foundations upon which they rest. Nowhere are these more clearly shown than in the Carroll study, in which "professional preparation" for foreign language majors is explicitly taken to mean preparation for a career as a foreign language teacher. And as we have pointed out, the parameters for such preparation or training simply do not correspond with those of the Government's needs.

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No, we are not saying that foreign language departments have not been doing their job. We are saying, though, that their job has not been to train people for most of the positions which are available in the Federal Government, so that any effort to evaluate academically the results of such analyses as those I have just cited is essentially an empty exercise. It does seem clear, however, that the preparation of foreign language students during the sixties was inadequate to qualify the products for Federal employment at the professional level, and there has been no subsequent information to indicate that this situation has changed.

Does residence overseas, either through Junior Year Abroad programs or otherwise, improve a candidate's language proficiency? The answer to this is that overseas experience can be a great advantage but is not always properly used. FSI will publish in the near future a study by linguists Margaret Omar and Claudia Wilds, surveying among other things the relationship between overseas experience and language proficiency in new Foreign Service Officers during the decade of the sixties. This study will show that of the language skills attained outside the

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Government by new officers during this period, 70 per cent were at least partially attributed by their possessors to overseas experience. Unfortunately there is no breakdown in this study between academic and non-academic experience, but my personal contact with new entrants during language proficiency tests indicates rather mixed results. Quite frequently candidates claiming to have had such experience are tested upon entrance into the service at an R-3+ or even at an R-4 level, while still speaking barely at an S-2 level. Why this happens is an interesting point, and one on which we shall elaborate in a moment. But the fact remains that there exists an "S-2/R-4 syndrome", and this does little to brighten the picture at which we are looking.

I realize full well the negative tenor of my remarks up to this point, but it is not my intention to lead you down a path toward despair. To reach any kind of salvation, however, it is necessary, as I indicated at the outset, that we take a hard, cold look at the realities of the present situation and evaluate our position, for only then can we begin to look for new directions to take. And there are new directions, and much that is positive to be

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said for our present capabilities, if we can only change our philosophical outlook.

Again, I would like to start from some personal observations, confirmed by conversations with my colleagues. There is one kind of applicant for Government employment which consistently displays a not only acceptable but even superior command of foreign languages. Applicants belonging to this group frequently receive better pay in their very first Government jobs because of their increased usefulness, due to competence in foreign languages. These applicants are Mormons. Members of this faith who have done missionary work overseas consistently come to us as new employees with wholly acceptable commands of the language of the country in which they have worked, and the contrast between them and the students who have spent one or more years abroad with but inconsistent results in acquiring the language of the host country is worthy of more than a little attention.

There is little in the training background of a Mormon going abroad to complete his or her required missionary work that can adequately explain this observed superior

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foreign language proficiency upon completion of the overseas experience and return to the United States. The mere fact of overseas residence is also insufficient, for there are many people who have lived abroad for even longer than the Mormons' required two years and still have acquired little of the host country's language. So it is nothing so obvious as academic background or physical presence, but rather attitude, a far more subtle thing, which appears to make the difference. But however subtle, this factor may just be the very crux of the entire issue of what is really meant by the acquisition of language proficiency.

Let us consider first the accepted attitude norms of our Western educational system. I don't think many would oppose the thesis that most of our education is explicitly aimed at career preparation, either generally or specifically. In the United States there is a cultural pattern of constant striving for what seems to be higher and higher level career positions, that is, we as a people do not aspire to be hereditary tradesmen or artisans. If anything, we aspire to reach either a social, professional, economic, or intellectual level somewhat higher than that of our forebears. Even the "do your own thing" pattern is aimed

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in a direction calculated to take the individual to what he considers to be a higher level than that of his current milieu.

The process of formal education plays a very strong role in this. It has traditionally been considered to be an information acquisition process, whether the information acquired be of an abstract, intellectual nature or of what might be considered a behavioristic one. But essentially, our attitude toward formal learning, whether it is via an academic medium or by experience ("learning by doing") remains a passive one: the learner, or student, is expected to spend his educational period absorbing knowledge which he will later put to use in the world of work, his active phase.

Again, please bear in mind that I am not making a value judgement here; rather, I am simply stating what I feel to be a fact of American culture, if not indeed a fact of contemporary Western culture in general.

To move from the general to the specific, let us now

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consider our foreign language training to see how it fits into this picture. Once again, I don't think many people will contest the notion that foreign language learning for us is a process of acquisition of knowledge. Some of this knowledge is of a purely intellectual nature, including not only an abstract understanding of grammar, but also of culture. The remaining corpus of information consists of a set of behavior patterns, meaning the manipulation of the language being taught, for whatever purpose. This input, or primarily passive absorption of information, is assumed to bear fruit at some time in the future, when the learner will use this information in the furtherance of his career. In fact, when you come right down to it, it is this very assumption which underlies this meeting today.

Not wishing to belabor a point any more than necessary, I still think it might be well worthwhile recalling that Carroll's study of foreign language majors assumed that part and parcel of such training was "professional preparation", i.e. specific preparation for a foreign language teaching career. Once again, a period of passive knowledge acquisition followed by a career of active output of information--the classic academic pattern.

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We might even say that every detail of our foreign language learning philosophy is a passive one: practice teaching as career preparation is "learning by doing", a junior year abroad is instituted to help students learn on the spot, to help them gain experience (knowledge), the various teaching methodologies vie with one another for efficiency of pattern acquisition, foreign language tables, clubs, field trips, reading, and so on--all with the assumption that we are helping the student to absorb a particular kind of information. I am not implying a value judgement here, either, but our attitude toward and expectations from this learning process are basically passive in tone, for good or ill.

If this hypothesis is correct, then we may also assume that our students carry about with them this same set of attitudes and expectations: they expect to play a passive role during their period of education, and only assume an active one later, when they consider their formal education to have ended.

Consider then the undergraduate or even graduate student overseas. Why is he there? In these terms he is there to study, to learn, for this is after all what is

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expected of him. He may also be there to have a good time, but then again youth is entitled to that. He may say he is also there to interact with the local population, but underlying this is the idea that the eventual purpose of this is to gain experience, meaning once again to absorb information. He may even say he expects to get to know the people, customs and culture, but this is still more absorption. He may say he is going to make friends while there, but that he could just as easily do at home. No, his role as a student, as long as he is a student, remains a passive one.

Now we must contrast this with the Mormon missionary overseas. This person is abroad with an entirely different set of expectations and attitudes. His role is a very active one: he has a mission to perform, and in that performance he will have to call upon every resource at his command to achieve real communication with the local population. Now by this I do not mean simply linguistic intercourse; this is not merely the exchange of ideas. What he has to do is to relate to the people of the host country, and even more important, get those people to relate to him as a human being. He will only be successful in what he

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is there to do to the extent that he can persuade the people he is among that he is credible as a human being. For him missionary work does not consist of mouthing certain ideas in a foreign tongue, of performing a kind of linguistic algebra to translate information from one code to another, but to bring his entire being into a state of communion with others. Language is of course a vital, in fact indispensable part of this, but it is still medium, not substance. And even more basically, his role is an active one; he is the bearer of something which he is to impart to others. These are the foundations of his ideas and attitudes.

Based on our earlier comparisons of communication performance upon entry into Federal service, it would seem then that the difference between attitudes, the contrast between passive and active self-views and expectations, may well be the key that unlocks the riddle of why, with all their formal training and experience, foreign language majors, and indeed college graduates with foreign language backgrounds in general, fall short of what the Government needs.

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We need people who know how to communicate, to relate, to meet another person as such and form a bond. Consider all of the various purposes for which the Government might want to use someone with foreign language competence: official representation overseas, Peace Corps work, teaching in bilingual schools, domestic social work with non-English speaking minorities, joint research at home or abroad in collaboration with foreign nationals. In none of these areas is mere mastery of language manipulative skills sufficient to get the job done; nor will additional intellectual knowledge of a foreign culture greatly enhance raw language. No, what is needed is the ability to truly communicate, to be fully human, to feel warmth, to understand with all one's being.

Thornsbury Grimlatch is a language major. He speaks many languages, or rather claims to have studied them, and yet for all of this he surely has not learned to communicate even in his native language. What is more, he doesn't seem to realize this himself, else he would not have sent me the letter he did. As it was, all he succeeded in doing was to arouse in me a mixture of condescension and pity. Nowhere in all of his studies had he

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perceived the main point of it all, and how unfortunately typical he is!

To sum up where we have gotten so far: What the Federal Government needs is people who have something to communicate and who know how to do it, in a foreign language in many instances. Our academic language programs are not producing such people. The Government's needs in this regard are not likely to change much--why indeed should they? --so to accommodate to the situation, if you are going to consider accommodating to it at all, some changes of attitude in the academic community will have to take place.

In the past I have made statements such as the foregoing at other presentations, and some of the responses I most frequently get run somewhat along these lines:
"But suppose we change our curriculum to include more conversation courses--wouldn't that mean de-emphasizing literature?",
or
"It's all well and good for FSI with its small classes to talk about intensive language study, but we in the schools and colleges have to cope with classes of as many as 35,

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meeting perhaps three hours a week. What can we do within that kind of framework?",

or

"But our liberal arts students have so many distributive requirements to meet that it's all we can do to persuade the curriculum committee to let us hang onto the the minimum foreign language requirements we have, let alone asking for more.",

or

"Since we've been on this recent specialized education kick our students have 'voted with their feet' and left our language classes. They say foreign language study is not relevant."

Such cries of protest are quite understandable under the circumstances, but their substance really does not go far beyond the level of pure administration. Class size, hours of attendance, number of semesters, class organization, methodology, curriculum components--all of these are largely administrative details. Not insignificant details, mind you, but details nonetheless. To solve this type of problem we have to consider far more basic attitudes and philosophies. The American tradition of liberal arts

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education is a great one and rightly honored, but it is equally formidable. One of its greatest bulwarks has been its basic tenet that study of the humanities is an indispensable broadening of the mind, for it makes the student aware not only of his cultural heritage but of the intellectual realms beyond the mundane. I subscribe fully to this, but I am pleading not only for the humanities but for humanity as well. Let us not don administrative blinders, trying to fit the student intellect into the matrix of a curricular schema based on numbers; let us rather work together with administration to achieve necessary goals.

And just exactly what are "necessary goals"? My friend and colleague Ronald A. C. Goodison likes to talk of the difference between "giving the people what they want and giving them what they need." The word "relevance" has become something of an academic Hydra, denigrating willy-nilly anything an individual is not especially interested in. So students have been left to decide what is relevant and what is not, and have been getting pretty much what they want. The question is, does what they want necessarily equate with what they need? Do they know what they need? Do we know what they need? Practical questions, and again

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we need practical answers.

First of all we don't know precisely what the students need in every case, because these needs are changing all the time. We the teachers therefore have to constantly research these needs. That is another reason why we are here today. And once we have established these needs, our next and most immediate task is to go about seeing to it that they are filled--even when this involves selling not only the students but also our respective administrations on what has to be done. That is why I say we should not allow our thinking to follow an administrative outline; rather that all of our educational activities should concentrate on filling the students' needs.

But suppose that even with the needs established the students still don't want what we say they should have? This is a problem in motivation, and this, like administration, is something which I believe each educational unit must work out for itself. Suffice it to say, however, that in response to an apparent lack of articulation between school foreign language output and the stated requirements of Government employment input there has to be a change in

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the way we think about language teaching if we view the Government as a career. Indeed, I think it's time we stopped thinking so much about language teaching and devoted more time to communication training.

As I said, I believe deeply in liberal arts education; I believe that thorough grounding in the humanities at all educational levels is one of American education's strongest points. But many foreign language teachers have expressed to me dismay at recent trends away from foreign language courses at the very time when they should be the most vigorous in pressing the case for still more training than we now have. That is to say, we should be working together with our colleagues in the other areas of the humanities to make both students and administrations at all levels understand that without the ability to communicate, with all that that word implies in truly human interaction, all the knowledge in the world will avail the student but little. And of course this means we may have to reshape our own ideas about what we need to do in our own language courses to make our output articulate better with the students' future aims. We have to try to transform our courses from passive exercises into active experiences,

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showing students how to relate to others, to us, to their peers, to the rest of the world. They have to be told that without this ability, regardless of their professional field, they will not be much better off as job-seekers than poor Thornsbury Grimlatch, deluded into thinking a person is the aggregate of the courses he has taken, discovering to his frustration that what the prospective employer is looking for is a human being, not a sheet of paper. And let us not forget that the Government, too, consists of people.

We are going to have to consider bold, new approaches such as applied group dynamics, incentive grades based on effectiveness of personal approach, close coordination with our colleagues in the English departments and other branches of the humanities, and perhaps most importantly, to make the foreign language classroom less foreign, a place where students and teachers form a kind of commonality of purpose, where everyone is on the same team.

What about majors? Again, I'm not at all sure just what is meant by the term "major" except in an academic-administrative sense. I've spoken to many other people in

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the Federal Government about this, and all of them agree on this point: in the absence of absolute criteria for measuring achievement and/or proficiency the fact that a student is or has been a language major means little to us.

Does this mean that the whole idea of language majors, especially at the undergraduate level, should be done away with? I think not. Rather, I think that we have to now take into account once again the findings of the various studies to which we have referred. The picture of the successful foreign language user in Federal service is one of a thoroughly trained person with work experience overseas. But even the majors surveyed in Carroll's study fell only slightly above the limited work proficiency levels. In the most practical terms, therefore, it seems that until we make some fairly drastic revisions in our teaching systems and philosophies, the minimum amount of formal foreign language training that a student needs to have in order to qualify for Government employment is that which is now equivalent to a major! What that means in terms of hours or semesters is again an administrative detail. But this is the need. And the need can and should be filled.

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How great is this need? What we are talking about in terms of Government usage alone is nothing less than a national human resource upon which, according to an authoritative Government report, around 60 million dollars were spent for Government training and research in fiscal year 1971.[9] And with all of that, as this same report by the General Accounting Office strongly indicates, we are still a long way off from satifsying our overseas needs for qualified foreign language personnel. This is not a need that is likely to decrease over the years, rather the opposite is true. In 1971 this training encompassed 150 languages and more than 18,000 students, and these figures have most certainly grown since.

Having thus ascertained that the Government really does have a vested interest in qualified people who are proficient at communicating in foreign languages, we might well ask why it doesn't hire more of our own teachers to staff its training programs. The reason is simply that in the terms I have already stated as the Government's position toward what we want students to learn, we need teams of native speakers and linguistic scientists to do our teaching.

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If this is the case, then are there in truth any Government jobs open for qualified language graduates, qualified that is, in terms of what we have outlined here? The answer to this is yes, provided the language skill is offered in conjunction with something else, some other ability which the Government can use. For the fact of the matter is that with the large and very competent language training services already at the Government's command it is quite feasible to train an employee in a foreign language in a comparatively short time. What is not possible for us to do is to train an economist, teacher, lawyer, and so on. The specific needs of the Government have already been well outlined in papers by Honig and Brod[10] as well as by Fuller,[11] but in reference to these articles it should be carefully borne in mind that the number of available Government jobs where language is primary is relatively small.

What is most probably the best way to go about finding a language-oriented position is through the Civil Service Commission, since that organization has the broadest range of contact with the various hiring agencies. The Commission maintains Federal Job Information Centers around the country; in Pennsylvania these are located in Harrisburg,

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Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and Wilkes-Barre, and they stand ready to answer specific questions concerning present job opportunities. A complete listing of these centers is available from the Commission,[12] which also publishes a booklet called Key People, describing some areas of Federal employment not noted in prior articles, such as the Defense Language Institute, Department of Defense Overseas Dependent Schools, and others, along with addresses to which to write for more information.[13]

In summary, then, the Federal Government can under present circumstances do little to expand the job market for foreign language majors, but on the other hand the study of communication through the medium of foreign languages can do much to enhance the attractiveness of a job applicant to many kinds of positions. To do this, however, it will be necessary to re-think some of our long-held notions of language learning. This is, therefore, no time for defeatism among foreign language teachers, but one for an aggressive attempt to strengthen the position of foreign language study as communication within the framework of the liberal arts curriculum.

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I sincerely regret that I cannot be more optimistic with you, but there are few easy answers. We are faced with a real challenge, and only the boldest thinking can overcome it. In order to attain the "climate of credibility" of which President Ford has spoken we will first of all have to achieve complete honesty with ourselves and with the times.

October 12, 1974

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NOTES

1 U.S. Department of State, The Foreign Service Institute, Its Purposes and Programs (October 1973).

2 Ibid.

3 School of Language Studies, Foreign Service Institute, U.S. Department of State, "Absolute Language Proficiency ratings."

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[4] Foreign Service Institute, U.S. Department of State (hereinafter cited as FSI), "Language Proficiency of New FSO-8's", (O/FSI;2/4/63).

[5] FSI, "Tested Foreign Language Proficiency of Junior Foreign Service Officers Upon Entry into the Foreign Service During FY-1969."

[6] FSI, "Tested Foreign Language Proficiency of Junior Foreign Service Officers Upon Entry into the Foreign Service During FY-73."

[7] John B. Carroll, The Foreign Language Attainments of Language Majors in the Senior Year (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1967).

[8] Carroll, p. 42 ff.

[9] Comptroller General of the United States, U.S. General Accounting Office, Report to the Congress: Need to Improve Language Training and Assignments for U.S. Government Personnel Overseas (Washington: GPO, B-176049, Jan. 22, 1973), p. 13.

[10] Lucille J. Honig and Richard I. Brod, Foreign

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Languages and Careers (New York: MLA, 1974).

[11] Carol S. Fuller, "Language-Oriented Careers in the Federal Government," ADFL, 6, No. 1 (Sept. 1974), pp. 45-51.

[12] U.S. Civil Service Commission, Federal Job Information Centers Directory", Pamphlet BRE-9 (Sept. 1973).

[13] U.S. Civil Service Commission, Key People: Careers in Education With Your Federal Government (Washington: GPO, 1969).